



AN

ORATION

DELIVERED

MARCH, 5th, 1787.



A N  
O R A T I O N,

D E L I V E R E D

MARCH 5th, 1777,

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE INHABITANTS

OF THE

TOWN OF BOSTON;

T O

COMMEMORATE THE BLOODY TRAGEDY

OF THE

FIFTH OF MARCH, 1770.

B Y  
BENJAMIN HICHBORN, Esq;

*Tum vos, O Tyri, streper et genus omne futurum  
Exercetis odiis; cunctique hac milite nos  
Munera: nullus amor populi; nec fœdera sancta* 2Y  
Virgil. E

B O S T O N :

Printed by EDES and GILL.

1777, DEC, 17, 1777.

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*AT a Meeting of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of BOSTON, duly assembled at Faneuil-Hall, and held by Adjournment at the Old-Brick Meeting-House on Wednesday the Fifth of MARCH, Anno Domini, 1777.*

**U**PON a Motion made, *Voted Unanimously*, That the Thanks of the Town be and hereby are given to BENJAMIN HICHBORN, Esq; for the *spirited* Oration delivered by him at their Request, in Commemoration of the horrid Massacre perpetrated on the Evening of the 5th of March, 1770, by a Party of Soldiers of the XXIXth Regiment, under the Command of Capt. Thomas Preston, and that

*Jonathan Williams, Esq;  
Mr. Ellis Gray,  
John Brown, Esq;  
Hon. Thomas Cushing, Esq;  
Col. Henry Jackson,  
Mr. Herman Brimmer, and  
Hon. William Cooper, Esq;*

~~Be a~~ Committee to wait upon Benjamin<sup>r</sup> Hichborn, Esq; and to desire a Copy of the Oration for the Press. *Attest,*

*William Cooper, Town-Clerk.*

~~GENTLEMEN:~~

**A**LWAYS esteeming myself a servant of the Town, I cannot so far gratify my own wishes as to refuse a compliance with their request.

**BENJAMIN HICHBORN.**

March 7th, 1777.

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A N  
O R A T I O N.

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FRIENDS and COUNTRYMEN!

**L**EAVING apologies for my inability to act the part I am to take, in this day's solemnity, to those who might have remedied the evil by a more suitable appointment—— I shall offer my sentiments upon the subject with the same freedom that I conceived them.—

The advantages of social Life, are the result of such evident necessity, so extensively diffusive and universally felt, that all Mankind will readily acknowledge their existence without the aid of metaphysics or history.

The right that every individual has to reason freely upon the nature of that government he is called to submit to, having nature for its source, is no less obvious and perceptible—and hence as a necessary foundation for the exercise of this right, I define civil liberty to be, not “a government by laws” made agreeable to charters, bills of rights or compacts, but a power existing in the people at large at any time, for any cause, or for no cause, but their own sovereign pleasure, to alter or annihilate both the mode and essence of any former government, and adopt a new one in its stead.

Placing

Placing ourselves then upon this broad basis of *civil liberty*, founded on *natural right*, we will unawed by the *standing armies* of any tyrants, tools, \* or monarchs, deliberate freely upon the nature of their institutions, and their dangerous tendency to the rights of man.

Every military force must necessarily imply a right of exercising an arbitrary power, so far as respects the objects against which it is to be directed; and what will be the objects against which it will be in constant exercise in proportion to its extent, we may collect from the experience of ages, and the well-known source of human actions.

The page of history seldom groans with the calamities of mankind, but we may trace the source of their unhappiness to this engine of oppression.

Projected in the blackest principles of the human mind, and supported by ambition and a lust of unbounded sway, this *armed monster* hath spread havock and misery throughout the world—We find the bloody traces of its footsteps through all the ruins of greatness, and freedom, either in ancient or modern times: the most free and opulent cities of the world, by conniving at its birth, have at last fallen a prey to its relentless fury. ‡

While

\* The petty states and princes who have raised their armies as a peasant would his game cocks, and sent them to market for a price, are in the most infamous sense of the word, *tools*.

Pisistratus of Athens, Dionisius of Syracuse, and Cæsar of Rome, furnish a few among numberless examples that history affords.

While we are ravished with the politeness, wisdom and greatness of the *Grecian* states, we can scarce believe that the productions of such art, refinement and learning, should ever be subdued by a power that never could have crept into life, but through the channel of *their* indulgence.

But alas ! their fate remains a standing MONUMENT of this truth, that freedom at sufference is a solacism in politics.

To avoid the pain that humanity must suffer, upon finding so few instances of virtue that have been proof against the temptations to prostitute a delegated power—I am inclined to think—that the great FOUNDER of societies has caused the CURSE of insatiable ambition and relentless cruelty to be entailed on those whose vanity may lead them to assume *his* prerogative among any of his people as they are cantoned about in the world, and to prevent mankind from paying that adoration and respect to the most dignified mortal, which is due only to *infinite wisdom and goodness* in the direction of *Almighty power*, and therefore that he alone is fit to be a MONARCH.

Were we to traverse the whole field of human transactions, and expect any where to find an exemption from this general charge, we should most naturally fix our eyes upon the Romans—But how mortified do we find ourselves by the survey ?

At the very time this people were most famed for their virtue and greatness,—while they were regaling themselves with luxurious



rious ease in the lap of freedom—the provinces they obtained by fraud and violence were suffering under every species of the vilest servitude, and made to contribute to that very ease and luxury at the discretion of the most merciless unfeeling task-masters.

But they themselves, by the same tools they had armed to execute their bloody purposes, in their turn, became the subjects of the same kind of oppression they so liberally dealt out to others, and stand recorded in history equal monuments of the greatness and depravity of human nature.

Taught by the experience of former ages—that a general at the head of an armed force would ever make himself superior to the laws, Europe for several centuries raised effectual barriers against the danger (and I may say the possibility) of their usurpations—for the tenure \* of their lands though they acknowledge a superior lord, was upon conditions so abhorrent to the idea of standing armies, that it offered at once both a promise and a pledge against them.

But to convince us that no human institutions can insure permanent felicity to mankind ;—*security*, the offspring of ease and freedom, opened the door for one enterprising usurper after another, ‡ till the inhabitants of the whole eastern world had but little left of the property of their species but what they possessed in their *shape*.----

Strange.

\* The feudal tenure.

‡ Charles VII and Lewis XI of France having set the example, all the crowned heads in Europe soon followed it.

Strange Metamorphosis !—But is it not much stranger still, to see these pitable wretches stript of every enjoyment that can render life a blessing, meanly courting favour of protection from the tyrants who enslaved them, and easily mistaken the *chains of servitude* for the *garbe of nature* ?

The *formalities* of a *free* and the ends of a *despotic* State (says a modern writer) have often subsisted together.—Britain furnishes a most unhappy example of this shocking truth :—As if the relish of liberty was pampered to make slavery itself more intolerably loathsome, they feel all the mortifying consequences of the basest servitude, and are left to console themselves with this consideration, that the weight of their grievances can never be encreased, while they are *complimented*, or rather *tantalized* with the name of *Free men*. These are some of the glorious effects of standing armies among *foreign nations*. Let us now consider their consequences in that part of the world, in whose affairs we take a more interesting part.—

It is easy to conceive that those men who would not scruple to make use of every artifice and violence to reduce the very people to whose generosity they were indebted for their splendor, wealth and greatness, to a state of vassalage, would never hesitate to make their conquests as extensive as their power,—they can feel the influence of no law but that of the *sword*, and therefore (whatever may be their pretensions) you will in every case find them ultimately make an appeal to its decisions.

If such are the *governors* what must the *people* be ? Having been robbed of liberty themselves, without the faintest struggle



in its defence, \* they are just fit to be made the instruments of wresting it from others.

How can we expect that they who know nothing of the happiness of freedom themselves should feel any reluctance at reducing all mankind to their own disgraceful situation? Indeed the reverse is true, for we generally find them taking an unnatural pleasure, in stripping others of the noblest ornaments and gifts of nature to countenance their own deformity and wretchedness :—

A trifling farce therefore, upon the question of *right* in parliament, was all the previous parade that was thought necessary to the introduction of a standing army, with all the ensigns of war into the bowels of our country.

It is needless to recount the various preludes to hostilities, the fatal day we now commemorate, opened a scene that filled every honest mind with indignation, and every tender heart with distress. †  
——It is impossible for any who were not witnesses of that shocking event, to conceive the terrors of that dreadful night, and they who *were* must have images of horror upon the mind they never can communicate.

The variety of contending passions that once fall upon and distract the mind, upon the arrival of such an important crisis, can never be realised but *once*. To

\* The murder of two or three people in St. George's fields, seems to be all the ceremony attending the death and burial of British liberty.

† —————Ovis talia fando,  
Myrmidonum, dolopumve, aut duri miles ulyssæi,  
Timor et a lackynia.

Virg.

# A N O R A T I O N. II

To see the peaceful inhabitants of a city, deliberately murdered by the very men, who in pretence, were supported for their protection—to hear the piercing groans, to see the mangled bodies and ghastly visages of the dying and the dead—to hear the shrieks and cries of the timid, with the promiscuous, mingling horrid sound of arms, execrations and vengeance, produced a scene of confusion and wretchedness so complicated and compleat, that the power of the richest language must ever fail in describing it. \*

The eye of pity is yet called to drop a tear at the sufferings, and patriotism to pour the balm of charity over the wounds of half-murdered citizens, dragging out a miserable life, and fresh bleeding with the blows aimed at our country.

We could dwell with a melancholly pleasure on this sad catastrophe, did not a more ample field of violence, bloodshed and cruelty demand our attention.

The palpable absurdity of making use of the *name of a king*, to give a sanction to those very operations which were carrying on *against him*, has been so sensibly felt, through all ranks of men, that we have not yet altogether got rid of its disagreeable effects.

And I must confess I should blush at the ludicrous figure in which this part of our history must exhibit to view in future time, were we not countenanced by the same, or more striking inconsistencies which are to be found attendant (and perhaps necessarily so) upon all important revolutions.

\* Non, nisi si lingua centum sint. orque centum.  
Et una vox, omnes. Ceterum comp.

We can easily conceive a mixture of prejudice and fear, that will excite such awful ideas of the person, to whom we have been taught from our cradles, to annex the properties of a *most gracious sovereign, most sacred majesty*, and a train of such godlike attributes, as would make us feel conscious of a degree of *impiety*, in calling a *villain* by his proper name, while shrouded under this garb of *sanctity*.

But it is exceedingly diverting to view the influence of this chimerical divinity in those who are made the immediate tools of supporting it—they will tell you it is a task most ungrateful to men of their sensibility and refinement, to be made the instruments of sending fire and death indiscriminately among the innocent, the helpless, and the fair—but they have sworn to be faithful to their sovereign, and were they ordered to scale the walls of the new Jerusalem, they should not dare to decline the impious attempt.

Were it not for this ridiculous faith in the omnipotence of the tyrant whom they serve, we must suppose them fools or madmen :—Indeed that very faith would justify the charge of extreme madness and folly against all mankind who had not been nurtured in this cradle of infatuation.

Were it not for the indulgence that a generous mind will always shew to the weakness and prejudices of the worst of men, many whom the chance of war has thrown into our hands must have felt the severity and contempt of a justly enraged people, while they with all their vanity and ostentation remain the *unhurt objects of our pity*.

It is surely rather a subject of merry ridicule than deserving of serious resentment, to see many of this kind of gentry affecting to deny

deny the character of prisoners, and attributing that indulgence which is the effect of unparelled generosity, to the mean motives of fear—but we will let them know, that they cannot provoke us even to *justice* in the line of *punishment*—and we leave them to their own consciences and the impartial censures of surrounding nations, to make some returns for the unexampled cruelties that many of our friends have suffered from their barbarous hands ; \* in lieu of that severity, which however just, humanity shudders to inflict. But we cannot think it strange to find people in the subordinate departments of life, influenced by such ridiculous notions, while their haughty masters seem to labour under the misfortune of the same infatuation.

Slaves always rate the consequence of those they serve, by the treatment they receive from them, and wonder that others do not feel the weight of the same importance.

To call men of distinguished rank in *any government*, *Knaves*, *Fools and Scoundrels*, however they may deserve it, is esteemed neither polite or decent :—I am therefore at a loss for names while

\* Capt. *Johnson* and his crew, the prisoners in general at *New-York* and *Halifax*, Mr. *Lowell* and many others in *Boston*, are instances sufficient to destroy the little credit they ever had for humanity—and the sufferings of some to which I have myself been a witness, exposed to all the inconveniences and hazards of a languishing disease in confinement on ship board, in view of the persons and habitations of their nearest friends and a sympathizing parent turned over the side with reproaches for attempting to speak to his sick, suffering, dying child, must give the characters of the *polite, sensible, humane* Admiral *Graves*, and his nephew *Sam*, a stamp of infamy, which the power of time can never wipe away.

while I am describing the oppressors of my country.—Who without deserving these reproachful appellations, could have conceived the horrid wish of decking his crown, with the idle plume of foreign empire at, the expence of the peace, wealth and very being of a *nation*? And who but a *pompous blockhead*, in the execution of this impious design could expect to conquer a hardy, virtuous set of men, by ineffectual threats and empty promises, contained in a set of *proclamations* he wanted either courage or power to disperse among the people they were designed to subdue? \*

Possibly they may conceive the length of their master's purse at the rate of thirty crowns a man, to be equal to all the armed force of Europe, and therefore they should be able ultimately to effect that by the point of the bayonet which they rather wished, than *expected* to obtain on any other terms.

Here let us pause, and for the honor of our species, give a moment to reflection upon this shocking idea! is it possible that any of the race of man, should be so lost to a sense of the rights of nature and the dignity of their rank in the chain of beings, as to suffer themselves (like the horses which they ride) to be tutored to the field of war, to have a price set upon their lives which their masters will receive, and then be sold into the service of *lust*, *ambition* and *avarice*, and become the tools of eternal war against the lives, the properties and freedom of the rest of mankind.

But

\* The Generals, Gage and Howe, have been playing this warlike game ever since they have been in the country.

But thanks to heaven ! this black combination of passions supported by the unmasked-tyrant of Britain with all the mercenary forces of his powerful and extensive allies, have hitherto proved unsuccessful (and I trust in God they ever will) in every effort to contaminate the only column of free air in *both hemispheres*—however, one advantage we derive from their *open attempts*, which is to expect no security for ourselves but in their ruin—deliberate murders, indiscriminate plunder and the most barbarous violence upon the delicacy and virtue of the fair, have marked the few paces of *imaginary conquest* they have trod. \*

Methinks I see the tender parent frantic with rage, defying hosts of ruffians armed, and courting death in every dismal form, rather than live the witness of his daughters shame—ah ! hear the shrieks of virgin innocence calling in vain for succour from that arm which oft defended her ! but see the helpless victim of their brutish lust, in wild despair wringing her *guiltless hands*, with looks to heaven, as if, without a crime, she had lost her only title to those pure abodes ! where is the *coward heart* that does not beat to arms and glow with unusual ardour for revenge ?

Where are friends to reconciliation, with these foes to virtue ? They will tell us their power is formidable, and it is wise to accommodate ourselves to the requisitions of superior force—as soon I'd tamper with the power of hell ! for

—————“ ’Tis the worst of slavery

“ Tamely to bend our necks beneath the yoke

“ And suffer fraud to talk us out of freedom.”

\* See accounts of their proceedings in the *Jersey*, and general orders in the orderly book taken at *Trenton*.



They wish to sooth but to destroy us ; and if this stale artifice of tyrants should succeed, we well deserve the ruin it ensures :—they never *ask* for what they can *demand* and impotence alone prevents a *general carnage*.

Does courage want a stimulous in the defence of virtues ; let us cast our eyes on the example of our illustrious General ;—equally beyond the reach of calumny and encomium, the tongue of slander has never dared to attack him, while the ablest panegerist must blush when he is attempting to give him *half* the eulogiums which are his due.

The generous sacrifice he has made of private interest, domestic felicity, and all the consequent refined enjoyments of social life to the exigencies of his country in the field of war—the cheerfulness with which he has sustained all the hardships, anxieties and disappointments of two important campaigns, against a formidable body of well-disciplined veterans, with an army composed of men different in their manners, and unused to the discipline of a camp, without exciting the smallest jealousies in the CIVIL POWER on the one hand, or giving occasion for the faintest murmurs among his *soldiers* on the other.—And finally when his enemies were at the zenith of their glory, and in imagination, already in possession of a conquered world ;—*with the remnant of his expiring army*, to resume the field, and with *this handful* of his chosen followers, disperse, destroy or captivate whole hosts of foes, must excite sentiments of affection, gratitude and esteem, that border upon *adoration*.

Did

Did not a life of the most disinterested patriotism and unremitted ardour in the cause of virtue and of mankind, point him out as an exception to the charge we have so fully supported against all who lived before him? I should dread more from the virtues of this *great man*, than from all the standing armies in the world.

But so full a confidence do I possess in his inviolable attachment to the rights of humanity and the cause of freedom, that in some future *emergencies* of the state—(produced perhaps by the shifting fortune of war)—to his instinctive goodness and excentric operations, I would most cheerfully commit supreme command.

I will explain my sentiments upon this subject, by those of a friend, in his own words.

“ ’Tis best that *reason* govern man,  
 ’Tis calm, deliberate, wise,  
 Yet *passions* were not given in vain,  
 Here then the difference lies.

*Reason*, tho’ *sure*, too slow is found  
 In great emergencies,  
 While *passion* instant feels the wound,  
 As quick the cure applies.

Yet *that* must not due bounds transgress,  
 But move at *reason*’s nod,

Submit at last to her decrees  
And own her for the God.

'Twas thus the synod of our land,  
The *reasoning* power of state,  
Gave WASHINGTON supreme command  
And made his orders fate.

Yet as *necessity* impelled  
The step—when that is past  
The *Senate* shall resume the field  
And reign supreme at last."

In the support of such a cause, directed by such a leader, who would think his life too dear a sacrifice?—Let the mean, base, grovelling soul, that wishes for security on *any terms*—thro' fear forget he is a man, cringe to the creature he despises, smile on the man he hates, alternately shake hands with vice and virtue, and court protection from the power he wishes to destroy!—Let us my friends! determined to maintain our sacred rights or perish in the attempt, \* with vigour urge the war, frown on our foes where'er we meet them, despise their *mercy* when we feel their *power*, and from this moment hold ourselves beyond the reach of *pardon*.

\* *Iustum et tenacem, propositi virum,  
Non curiam ardor, prava jubentium  
Non vultus instantis tyranni  
Mente quatit solida : ———*